

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece for joining two containers, that are stacked one atop of the other, at their corner fittings, the coupling piece comprising a stop plate and a coupling projection on each side of [[the]] said stop plate, a first said coupling projection being placed on said corner fitting of one of the containers and a second said coupling projection being provided with a locking catch for locking inside a corner fitting of the other of the containers, said locking catch, when viewed in the longitudinal direction of the containers, being arranged laterally on said second coupling projection and said locking catch having a sloping shoulder on an upper side thereof.

2. (Previously Presented) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein the length of said second coupling projection is slightly shorter than the length of an elongated hole of the associated corner fitting of the other container.

3. (Previously Presented) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein the maximum width of said locking catch is slightly less than the width of said elongated hole of the associated corner fitting of the other container.

4. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein ~~said~~ leading edges of said second coupling projection have a contour corresponding to the contour of the elongated hole, and include an arc-shaped contour portion.

5. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein said second coupling projection has a lead-in taper under said locking catch.

6. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein a lead-in chamfer is arranged on the long side facing away from said locking catch at the junction between said second coupling projection and said stop plate.

7. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim ~~[[1]]~~ 6, wherein said lead-in chamfer has an angle corresponding to said chamfer ~~(32)~~ at said elongated hole of the container corner fitting.

8. (Previously Presented) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 6, wherein said lead-in chamfer includes a first chamfer corresponding to the chamfer at said elongated hole and, under said elongated hole, a second chamfer having an angle that is flatter compared to said chamfer.

9 – 11 (Canceled)

12. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 1, wherein said locking catch is mounted to be movable against said second coupling projection.

13. (Currently Amended) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 12, wherein said locking catch is cross-slidable against ~~[[the]]~~ a force of a spring.

14. (Currently Amended) An arrangement of containers stacked one atop the other onboard ships, the containers being joined with one another with coupling pieces at corner fittings, each of said coupling pieces comprising a stop plate and a first side coupling projection on a first side of said stop plate and a second side coupling projection on a second side of said stop plate, said first side coupling projection being placed on said corner fitting of one of the containers and said second coupling projection being provided with a locking catch for locking inside a corner fitting of the other of the containers, said locking catch being arranged laterally on said second coupling projection wherein the containers are joined with one another at least at the corner fittings of a front side of said containers with said coupling pieces, said locking catch having a sloping shoulder on a stop plate side of said locking catch.

15. (Previously Presented) An arrangement in accordance with claim 14, wherein said containers are joined with one another at all their corner fittings with a coupling piece.

16. (Previously Presented) An arrangement in accordance with claim 15, wherein said locking catches of said coupling pieces, which are assigned to the front corner fittings on one of the front walls of said containers, when viewed in the longitudinal direction of said containers, point in a lateral direction, and said locking catches of said coupling pieces, which

5 are assigned to the rear corner fittings on the other of the front walls of said containers, point in the opposite direction.

17. (Currently Amended) A method for joining said containers stacked one atop the other, [[,]] the method comprising:

~~coupling pieces at corner fittings,~~

5 providing containers with coupling pieces at corner fittings, each of the coupling pieces comprising a stop plate and a first side coupling projection on a first side of the stop plate and a second side coupling projection on a second side of the stop plate, the first side coupling projection being placed on the corner fitting of one of the containers and the second side coupling projection being provided with a locking catch for locking inside a corner fitting of the other of the containers, the locking catch being arranged laterally on the second coupling projection and the locking catch having a sloping shoulder on a stop plate side of the locking
10 catch; and

moving the upper container relative to the lower container ~~during the~~ to provide an automatic coupling and/or uncoupling with the lower container.

18. (Currently Amended) A method in accordance with claim 17, wherein the upper container is rotated about its vertical axis during the coupling and/or uncoupling by means of the shape of the second side coupling projection generated generating a lateral force upon
lifting the upper container, the shape including the sloping shoulder of the coupling pieces and

the sloping shoulder sliding on a surface of the respective corner piece with locking catches at one end of the container directed in one lateral direction and with locking catches at another end of the container directed in another lateral direction.

19. (Currently Amended) A method for joining said containers according to claim 17, wherein plural containers are stacked one atop the other, particularly onboard ships, with said coupling pieces wherein said upper container is one of:

offset laterally during the coupling and/or uncoupling with the lower container; and

5 rotated about its vertical axis during the coupling and/or uncoupling with the lower container.

20. (Previously Presented) A method in accordance with claim 17, wherein said upper container is offset laterally during the coupling and/or uncoupling due to the shape of said coupling pieces.

21. (New) A coupling piece arrangement for joining two containers, that are stacked one on top of the other, the coupling arrangement comprising:

a lower container corner fitting having a normally horizontal upper surface, corresponding to a normally horizontal upper surface of the lower container of the two containers, said corner fitting having a chamfered opening leading to a normally vertical elongate hole with a catch receiving surface leading to a laterally expanded lower hole portion;

and

a coupling piece with a stop plate and an upper container coupling projection on an upper side of said stop plate for placement in a corner fitting of an upper container and a lower coupling projection on a lower side of said stop plate for placement in said lower container corner fitting, said lower coupling projection comprising a non-positive locking means including a locking catch extending laterally with respect to a longitudinal direction of the containers and having a friction engagement surface for engaging said catch receiving surface inside said lower container corner fitting, said non-positive locking means for guiding said coupling piece during insertion into said lower container corner fitting with a guided lateral movement of said lower coupling projection away from said catch receiving surface, with a subsequent guided downward movement of said lower coupling projection into said laterally expanded lower hole portion and with a following subsequent guided lateral movement of said lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface to bring said friction engagement surface into contact with said catch receiving surface to provide frictional locking of said coupling piece in said lower container corner fitting against torsional forces and for allowing removal of said coupling piece from said lower container corner fitting by guiding said coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon applying upward force on said coupling piece.

22. (New) A coupling piece in accordance with claim 23, wherein said non-positive locking means includes a catch surface of said locking catch with a sloping shoulder defining

said friction engagement surface and with a forward end with a lead-in taper to impart said guided lateral movement during insertion and with said lower coupling projection having a lead-in chamfer adjacent to said stop plate and extending laterally with respect to the longitudinal direction of the containers in a direction opposite to said locking catch to impart said following subsequent guided lateral movement of said lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface during insertion and said sloping shoulder guiding said coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon applying upward force on said coupling piece.

23. (New) An arrangement of containers stacked one atop the other onboard ships, the arrangement comprising:

an upper container with an upper container first corner fitting at a normally horizontal lower surface, with an upper container second corner fitting at the lower surface, with an upper container third corner fitting at the lower surface, and with an upper container fourth corner fitting at the lower surface;

a lower container with a lower container first corner fitting at a normally horizontal upper surface, with a lower container second corner fitting at the upper surface, with a lower container third corner fitting at the upper surface, and with a lower container fourth corner fitting at the upper surface, each of said lower container corner fittings comprising a normally horizontal fitting upper surface, corresponding to the upper surface of the lower container, with an opening leading to a normally vertical elongate hole with a catch receiving surface adjacent

to a laterally expanded lower hole portion;

a first coupling piece with a first piece stop plate and a first piece upper container coupling projection on an upper side of said first piece stop plate for placement in said upper container first corner fitting and with a first piece lower coupling projection on a lower side of said first piece stop plate for placement in said lower container first corner fitting, said first piece lower coupling projection comprising a first piece non-positive locking means including a first piece locking catch extending laterally with respect to a longitudinal direction of the containers and having a first piece friction engagement surface for engaging said catch receiving surface inside said lower container first corner fitting, said first piece non-positive locking means for guiding said first coupling piece during insertion into said lower container first corner fitting with a guided lateral movement of said first piece lower coupling projection into said opening and away from said catch receiving surface, with a subsequent downward movement of said first piece lower coupling projection into said laterally expanded lower hole portion and with a following subsequent guided lateral movement of said first piece lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface to bring said first piece friction engagement surface into contact with said catch receiving surface to provide frictional locking against torsional and lateral forces and for removal of said first coupling piece from said lower container first corner fitting by guiding said first coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon pulling said upper container upwardly;

a second coupling piece with a second piece stop plate and a second piece upper container coupling projection on an upper side of said second piece stop plate for placement

in said upper container second corner fitting and with a second piece lower coupling projection on a lower side of said second piece stop plate for placement in said lower container second corner fitting, said second piece lower coupling projection comprising a second piece non-positive locking means including a second piece locking catch extending laterally with respect to a longitudinal direction of the containers and having a second piece friction engagement surface for engaging said catch receiving surface inside said lower container second corner fitting, said second piece non-positive locking means for guiding said second coupling piece during insertion into said lower container second corner fitting with a guided lateral movement of said second piece lower coupling projection into said opening and away from said catch receiving surface, with a subsequent downward movement of said second piece lower coupling projection into said laterally expanded lower hole portion and with a following subsequent guided lateral movement of said second piece lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface to bring said second piece friction engagement surface into contact with said catch receiving surface to provide frictional locking against torsional and lateral forces and for removal of said second coupling piece from said lower container second corner fitting by guiding said second coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon pulling said upper container upwardly;

a third coupling piece with a third piece stop plate and a third piece upper container coupling projection on an upper side of said third piece stop plate for placement in said upper container third corner fitting and with a third piece lower coupling projection on a lower side of said third piece stop plate for placement in said lower container third corner fitting, said

third piece lower coupling projection comprising a third piece non-positive locking means including a third piece locking catch extending laterally with respect to a longitudinal direction of the containers and having a third piece friction engagement surface for engaging said catch receiving surface inside said lower container third corner fitting, said third piece non-positive locking means for guiding said third coupling piece during insertion into said lower container third corner fitting with a guided lateral movement of said third piece lower coupling projection into said opening and away from said catch receiving surface, with a subsequent downward movement of said third piece lower coupling projection into said laterally expanded lower hole portion and with a following subsequent guided lateral movement of said third piece lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface to bring said third piece friction engagement surface into contact with said catch receiving surface to provide frictional locking against torsional and lateral forces and for removal of said third coupling piece from said lower container third corner fitting by guiding said third coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon pulling said upper container upwardly; and

a fourth coupling piece with a fourth piece stop plate and a fourth piece upper container coupling projection on an upper side of said fourth piece stop plate for placement in said upper container fourth corner fitting and with a fourth piece lower coupling projection on a lower side of said fourth piece stop plate for placement in said lower container fourth corner fitting, said fourth piece lower coupling projection comprising a fourth piece non-positive locking means including a fourth piece locking catch extending laterally with respect to a longitudinal direction of the containers and having a fourth piece friction engagement surface for engaging

said catch receiving surface inside said lower container fourth corner fitting, said fourth piece non-positive locking means for guiding said fourth coupling piece during insertion into said lower container fourth corner fitting with a guided lateral movement of said fourth piece lower coupling projection into said opening and away from said catch receiving surface, with a subsequent downward movement of said fourth piece lower coupling projection into said laterally expanded lower hole portion and with a following subsequent guided lateral movement of said fourth piece lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface to bring said fourth piece friction engagement surface into contact with said catch receiving surface to provide frictional locking against torsional and lateral forces and for removal of said fourth coupling piece from said lower container fourth corner fitting by guiding said fourth coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon pulling said upper container upwardly.

24. (New) An arrangement of containers in accordance with claim 23, wherein each said non-positive locking means includes a catch surface of said locking catch with a sloping shoulder defining said friction engagement surface and with a forward end with a lead-in taper to impart said first guided lateral movement during insertion and with said lower coupling projection having a lead-in chamfer adjacent to said stop plate and extending laterally with respect to the longitudinal direction of the containers in a direction opposite to said locking catch to impart said following subsequent guided lateral movement of said lower coupling projection toward said catch receiving surface during insertion and said sloping shoulder

guiding said coupling piece away from said catch receiving surface upon applying upward force on said coupling piece.

25. (New) An arrangement of containers in accordance with claim 24, wherein said lower container first corner fitting and said lower container second corner fitting are adjacent to a first end of said lower container and said lower container third corner fitting and said lower container fourth corner fitting are adjacent to an opposite second end of said lower container and said first piece locking catch extends laterally in a first lateral direction, said second piece locking catch extends laterally in said first lateral direction, said third piece locking catch extends laterally in a second lateral direction and said fourth piece locking catch extends laterally in said second lateral direction wherein said first lateral direction is opposite to said first lateral direction.